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THE GROUP AS A REINFORCER OF REALITY--A POSITIVE APPROACH IN THE TREATMENT OF ADOLESCENTS.

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THE STRUCTURAL AND DYNAMIC IMPLICATIONS OF DEALING WITH ADOLESCENT PROBLEMS AS A NORMAL PART OF LIFE, RATHER THAN IN TERMS OF PATHOLOGY, INCLUDE THE AIM OF INTERVENTION, THE EFFECTS OF PSYCHOTHERAPY, THE DESIRE FOR INTRAPSYCHIC CHANGE, THE ADOLESCENT PERSONALITY AND PROBLEMS, THE PERSON'S PERCEPTION OF HIS ROLE, THE STRUCTURE OF THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP, AND THE PERCEPTION OF CHANGE AS ASSISTANCE IN PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT. SELF-DEVELOPMENT AND GROUP INTERACTION EFFECT CHANGE IN THESE AREAS--IMPROVING THE ADOLESCENT'S SELF CONCEPT, HIS PERCEPTION OF REALITY AND THE OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO HIM, AND HIS CAPACITY TO MOBILIZE HIMSELF, TAKE RESPONSIBILITY, AND RELATE MORE POSITIVELY TO OTHERS. GROUP EXPERIENCES REINFORCE EACH OTHER WITH THE EMPHASIS ON HUMAN RELATIONS. PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT IS ENHANCED THROUGH FORMAL CLASSES, FAMILY-LIFE EDUCATION GROUPS, SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY CLASSES, MANAGEMENT OF THE SCHOOL ITSELF, TUTORING OTHERS, AND IMPROVING THE NEIGHBORHOOD CLIMATE. INTEGRATED PROGRAMS COMBINE AND ADAPT THE SOCIAL SYSTEMS AND INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC APPROACHES INTO A METHOD FOR AIDING GENERAL PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE INDIVIDUAL'S LIFE SPACE. (WR)

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# THE GROUP AS A REINFORCER OF REALITY: A POSITIVE APPROACH IN THE TREATMENT OF ADOLESCENTS

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In this paper, it is planned to discuss a treatment approach by which the intervention is built into the everyday life of the patient and the focus of the intervention is not on his failures and inadequacies but on his goals and desires and how he goes about achieving them.

Psychotherapy is concerned with the achievement of changes in the individual's psychic structure and functioning so that he feels more satisfied with and in himself, effects more harmonious relationships with his environment, and mobilizes himself to best advantage. All such change is achieved by the individual's gaining a new perspective on himself and his world, through increased understanding about the self and the environment and/or through new experiences. Thus, for instance, guidance can be seen as primarily an intellectual intervention, psychoanalysis a combination of experience and understanding; positive reinforcement approaches, abreactive techniques and activity group therapy emotional and experiential.

All permanent intrapsychic change is made in and by the individual and cannot be achieved against his will. No change will occur unless the forces within him are on balance in favor of making change. At some level, the patient must want to mobilize himself in a positive direction.

When an individual seeks or is sent for psychotherapy, he has to recognize that there is something which is not satisfactory about himself and his functioning, that he is in some way deviant, and that he is not adequate to make the necessary changes on his own. He must seek help from an expert and place himself in a dependent position. At a minimal level, he must accept the authority of the therapist or the therapeutic agent. He must agree to expose himself and to surrender some control

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over himself (MacLennan[1]).

Because adolescence as a transitional period is one of maximum insecurity, this posture can be particularly hard for the teenager. The youth is changing physically and emotionally. He is struggling to obtain control over new drives within himself which sometimes threaten to overwhelm him and which make him anxious about his sanity. He is striving to define his changing position in the world, to review old controls and values, and to obtain status as an adult on an equal basis with other adults. Thus, the acceptance of the patient-position can be viewed as going against the life force of the adolescent and is often strongly resisted by him.

It has also become clear that often when an individual is given a particular reputation, stereotyped into a certain role and thus stigmatized by the community, both the organizational structures and the individual's own feelings about himself conspire to make him live out the role. For instance, when an individual is called mentally ill or delinquent, people start relating differently to him. They expect him to be queer, dangerous, or irresponsible, and he is set apart and barred from many opportunities. In his anger and despair, he may well accept the role, cease to struggle against the pressures, and behave defiantly in the ways which are expected of him.

In recognition of this, attempts have been made over the last few years to structure the therapeutic situation differently so that the relationship between the individual and the change agent is a less threatening one and the intervention utilizes the constructive needs and desires of the youth. In such approaches, the strengths and

achievements of the individual are emphasized and problems are considered as blocks to the achievement of the youth's aspirations.

The need for change is not presented as a special and abnormal event but rather as a normal aspect and an integral part of all living. In this framework, treatment might preferably be called assistance in personal development rather than therapy. Such interventions take place in normal settings such as schools, colleges, youth residences, recreational clubs, employment counseling agencies, youth leadership and job training programs, research programs, and on the job itself. The youth do not see themselves as patients but as students, members, informants, colleagues, co-leaders, participants, helpers, trainees, or individuals seeking assistance in making plans for normal living. The group selected as the vehicle of change is one to which the individual normally belongs in his daily life: a class, a club, a planning group, a work team; and the therapists are also teachers, recreation leaders, residence directors, research workers, work supervisors, trainers. Their therapeutic function is built in as one aspect of a non-therapeutic role.

This approach falls between group work in a therapeutic setting where the youth have had to acknowledge themselves as patients and normal activities which are primarily task oriented. The self-developmental and interactional elements of the group activity are considered at least as important as the overt task of the group. In an art club, for instance, the youth learn not only the mastery of draftsmanship and the use of paint, but also how to perceive the world uniquely, apply themselves, take interest in each other, make group decisions about program and the allocation of tasks.

The media through which changes are achieved are: information which is fed into the group discussion; the relationships developed and experienced in the group; the group culture which is created and its pressures on members; an examination and understanding of the group interaction; physical, intellectual, and interactional skills which are developed in the group; feedback from persons who share other aspects of daily living.

Such groups provide opportunities for change along the following dimensions. Changes are achieved in the self-image through the individual's taking on a new role and developing a different identity. He is seen as different by the community and demands are made of him. He learns skills, becomes more competent, and experiences success. His problems and faults as well as his assets are known, and he is accepted as he really is by the leader and the other group members. The individual becomes more sophisticated about human behavior. He learns to observe and understand interactional behavior. He is confronted with his impact on others and is provided with the opportunity to test out different ways of relating to others. He experiences others relating to him in new ways. He can examine what is socially acceptable and why and learn how community, institution, group, family, and individuals develop and operate and how to increase his social skills. He can reexamine his values and his goals. Such groups provide practice in thinking through and working out problems, in coming to personal and group decisions, and in taking personal and group responsibility. For instance, in club groups, when youth plan parties, they learn to anticipate problems such as gate crashers and to think through how they will cope with them. They face the fact that the privilege of having parties

entails the responsibility for ensuring that they are well conducted. They promote respect for self and others and the capacity to empathise. They provide opportunities to deal with feelings about authority, rivalry with peers, positive and negative feelings, to understand the ways in which the individual himself manages anxiety and intra-psychic conflict. In examining their own behavior in their group, members can examine how they compete for attention, challenge authority, practice one-upmanship, how they defend against revealing themselves, resist the joys of intimacy because of expected disappointment, rejection, and loss.

Structurally, such groups are always related to non-dynamic tasks in a primary or secondary fashion; that is, they may either be a direct experience as the activities of a work team or they may be learning about and discussing experiences as in work supervision. A number of programs have been devised in which several group experiences reinforce each other. For instance, work experience, skill training, formal education, and residential living may be packaged into a comprehensive program as in the Job Corps. Although such groups are task focused and discussion or activities are related to the task, the use of the group to help the individual change and develop himself is of central importance, and the quality of inter-personal experience and discussion is the primary value of these groups. The role of the leader is an active one, and the groups are structured so that the boundaries of the group and the demands on the members are clear. Repression is not stimulated or encouraged through fantasy and the examination of early memories and unconscious material.

For instance, in the Howard University New Careers[2,3] program which was developed to create opportunities for out-of-school, out-of-work

youth from socially disadvantaged backgrounds to enter careers in a variety of human services and to train them for such work, the various components of the training were designed to reinforce each other. The program consisted of supervised work in human service which was significant and useful, skill workshops, remedial education classes, and a core group which served as a medium for social science education and for the kind of counseling described above.

In each of these groups, but particularly in the core group, the trainees learned about human relations. They examined the ways in which they dealt with each other and with their clients; children in school, day care, recreation or institutional living; adults in hospital; and learned to think about whether children, when they cried, were tired, hungry, angry, frightened, trying to get attention; to examine why they themselves reacted differently to different children. They worked on their own values and concepts of themselves. For instance, when one of the trainees was arrested for gambling and turned up late to work, the group examined the relationship between private life and work and to what extent they could and should be models for the children. They first thought that each person's private life was his own. Then they began to consider how, by being arrested, the aide might have let the children down or been fired himself. Finally, they tackled the problem of how they wanted the children and the parents to think of them, what kind of model they should be. Boys and girls who had resisted education for years began to feel the need to be able to write and speak well, and they began to demand more formal education. They became aware how, when they were uncomfortable, they would start to fight, talk about something else,

burst into physical activity, or withdrew into sleep or sullen silence. As they were held to and mastered activities and gained the respect and affection of supervisors and clients, they ceased to see themselves as failures and ne'er-do-wells. Boys and girls with long histories of impulsive or aggressive behavior began to buckle down and to work responsibly and sensitively in this program. Many Neighborhood Youth Corps programs have followed this pattern[13].

Lack of frustration tolerance and motivation for change and learning do not manifest themselves uniformly in the personality. They are intimately connected with the individual's desires and expectations, the opportunities which are offered, and the support which is given. Education offers great opportunities for personal development if the various activities in the school are geared in this direction. The formal curriculum can deal with human relations, not only in courses such as human growth and development and family life education, but also in the examination of human dilemmas and their resolution in English, in the way in which the community works in social science, in a consideration of work roles and the management of money in economics not only from the economic framework, but also in terms of its social and psychological implications. Many problems which the children are experiencing elsewhere can be discussed in a less threatening way through analogies to the literature. Good teaching offers every individual opportunity for success and more self-knowledge and self-mastery through the development of new skills. Homeroom and counseling sessions provide a chance to examine individual and group interactions and goals and to enable the individual to plan for himself and with the group.

A number of writers, such as Jones[4], have described the use of family life education groups in high school and college as vehicles for personal development on the part of the students.

Sheldon Roen[5] has used an elementary school psychology class as a vehicle for personal development where the children were able to examine the ways they related to each other in the classroom, their feelings, satisfactions, and problems at home as well as learning about how children grew up.

Management of the school itself can be used as a means of training children and youth in responsibility and problem solving if it is organized so that the students participate in the formulation of policy and the maintenance of order. Responsibility is increased as the children advance through school with the classroom being the initial laboratory for leadership training and extending to overall school functions in the higher grades. Several experiments are being undertaken in Oregon and other places (Pearl[12]).

Riessman[6] has emphasized the double pay-off of the "Helper Principle" where students in being trained to tutor and in tutoring others improve their own performance. Similarly, in Junior Counselor training, the counselors in their training groups learn about human relations. They study themselves in their interactions to each other in seminar groups, and they test out their perceptions and gain more understanding and mastery of themselves in their counseling of others. For instance, two students who had great difficulty in tolerating very dependent, demanding, and changing clients, learnt much about their own feelings about themselves and their families in examining this problems.

In the development of a neighborhood recreation program, the Bakers Dozen Youth Center[7] in Washington, D. C. found that, in general, children from low income neighborhoods function below capacity in the larger society because they have to respond to the values and pressures of a deviant sub-culture. The Center attempted to change the neighborhood climate through the training of youth leaders who ran the recreation groups and served as models for the younger children. They tried to foster amongst the children more agreeable ways of relating to each other and to build some educational remediation into the program as well as to enable the children to have fun. In planning trips and parties, the children learnt to anticipate and think ahead, to come to group decisions, and to hold responsibly to them. In playing games and in their group interactions, they became conscious of the problems they had in getting along together. They learnt to like and trust rather than to exploit each other. Such groups in order to be effective must reach the point of accepting a positive value system so that they recognize, for instance, that if they break up a game when they are losing, they are likely to be in trouble or excluded and everyone will have much less fun.

The Job Corps has also designed an integrated program in which opportunity for personal and social development are provided in a residential job training setting. The program has four components: formal education, vocational training, group life, and community recreation.

The group life unit deals with the problems of daily living, works on troubles that have started on the job, plans recreation, considers the aspirations, goals, and problems after the youth leave the program. Because

the youth are drawn from many cultural backgrounds, they must come to terms with difference and recognize that there are many customs, views, and attitudes which, if not adapted, must at least be accepted and tolerated.

In many of the poverty programs, youth and other indigenous workers have been employed as research informants and program evaluators because of the specialized knowledge which they possess of their own communities[11]. However, in such activity, they inevitably gain a greater understanding of themselves and the world in which they live; their values and promises; their relationships to others; the way in which they differ from others in their community; the power and structure of their community and how it fits into the larger society.

Such integrated programs necessitate a change in the attitudes and relationships of the interveners, be they trainees, therapists, or senior colleagues, to each other and to the youth. They have to be willing to submit their own opinions and actions to scrutiny and to recognize and admit that they do not know all the answers. The dichotomous system between authorities and the rest with its divided loyalties and secrets and miscommunications so well described by Goffman[8] and illustrated by Polsky[9], is reduced to a single interacting group in which all attempt to achieve, in task related fashion, improved functioning and common goals[10].

These approaches raise questions about whether all problems can and should be worked on within normal settings or whether some youth, because of the severity of their problems, must have a specially designed therapeutic environment. In our own experience, we have found that some violent and very difficult youth have been able to respond remarkably and give up their irresponsibility and lack of self control when placed in a situation where expectations and opportunities were congruent and positive.

In this paper, some of the structural and dynamic implications of dealing with problems as a normal part of life rather than in terms of pathology have been discussed. Such an approach is concerned with improving the individual's self consept, his perception of reality and the options available to him, and his capacity to mobilize himself, take responsibility for his actions, and relate more positively to others. It combines and adapts the social systems and the individual psychotherapeutic approaches into a method for aiding general personal development in the context of the individual's normal life space.

TREATMENT OF ADOLESCENTS -- COMPLETE REFERENCES


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